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SUBJECT: IS SENEGAL'S DEMOCRATIC CONSENSUS AT RISK?

REF: A)DAKAR 1149; B)DAKAR 1011; C)DAKAR 0817;
D)DAKAR 0681; E)DAKAR 0565; F)05 DAKAR 1243

CLASSIFIED BY POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROY L. WHITAKER, FOR
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) There is deep-rooted Senegalese consensus in favor of freedom of expression, rule of law, respect of national institutions, conformity to parliamentary or executive rules or custom, civilian control of security forces, the desirability of dialog between authorities and opposition, and an expectation that leaders will respond to public needs. The 2000 election proved the value of the democratic consensus, showing voters that failed leaders could be replaced by ballot without threat to public order.

2. (C) President Wade, in disdaining the French-bequeathed bureaucratic system and reliance on inter-institutional arrangements for a more flexible and egocentric style, has called elements of the democratic consensus into question. We are not by any means convinced he lacks commitment to democratic rule or free elections. Still, we review below what constitutes Senegalese democracy, examine growing concerns that it could be at some risk, and explore ways the U.S. could help assure fair elections in 2007. END SUMMARY

AN IMPERFECT AFRICAN DEMOCRACY

3. (C) Senegalese have never accepted an all-powerful and all-consuming "big man" as leader. Founding President Leopold Senghor, as much French Catholic as he was African, combined his Independence movement with French colonial institutions to establish a severely-curtailed but effective democracy. Citizens of 1960s and 1970s Senegal could rally, speak out and criticize even the president, though their power to challenge the de facto single-party government was limited by Socialist control of the media; close links between state, religious leaders and traditional chiefs; and legal restrictions on the Left and other political parties.

4. (C) In this real but limited democracy, the National Assembly was free to debate but expected to approve any bill Senghor sent it. The single legal labor union was incorporated in the state. Rules of law and institutional predictability were respected, though as time went on a measure of corruption was allowed to grease the wheels. The army was well paid and under civilian control, though Senghor used it sometimes politically, as when he ordered enlistment of unruly Marxists. Police and gendarmes were republican institutions, but Senghor also had young loyalist toughs whom he could use for rare instances when an arm had to

be twisted.

¶5. (C) Within the one-party democracy, factions or inchoate interest groups championed their region, ethnicity or religion and the energetic and to-politics-born Senghor networked closely with them all. In 1974, he allowed Wade to lead the first loyal opposition, though he identified whenever Wade surpassed proper bounds and quickly acted by law or rougher methods to limit Wade's room to maneuver.

¶6. (C) The underlying rules of one-party democracy remained intact even as Senghor's system declined in efficiency and decayed in public confidence under his more lethargic and less astute successor Abdou Diouf (1980-2000). The rules reinforced the predictable performance of national institutions. Combined with occasional electoral chicanery, they also permitted exercise of democratic rights while ultimately denying the opposition any real chance during either the campaign or the vote count.

¶7. (C) Until 2000, Senegalese may have seen elections as a form of the idle conversation they love so much -- pleasant and often exhilarating but without consequences. Only in 2000 did they realize their vote let them hold leaders accountable and replace them. It was a psychological boost, one we hear voters will not relinquish lightly.

2000: WADE'S COALITION EXPECTED TO PLAY BY THE RULES

¶8. (C) A deep, massive, widespread, decade-long revulsion against Socialist-led economic decline,

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combined with an unprecedented coalition of Wade's PDS plus the Left and a significant rebel Socialist faction, allowed Wade to hold the Socialists under 50 percent in the first-round 2000 presidential election. This shattered the Socialist aura of invincibility and paved the way for a rout in the second round. Once elected, Wade's allies expected Wade to enact new policies, but they also expected him to play by old rules.

¶9. (C) Wade had other ideas. His enforcer Idrissa Seck replaced Wade coalition allies with Socialist turncoats who from the moment of defection would owe their futures to Wade. Seck overreached and was sidelined, but not before strengthening the already extensive powers of the presidency and removing from government those with political weight to influence Wade's decisions. Wade's decisions since have often seemed whimsical, self-serving or even an outright challenge to the democratic consensus, as in his widely-resented late 2004 decision to allow Parliament to pass a bill pardoning political crimes.

CLEVER, DASTARDLY OR DOWNRIGHT SUBVERSIVE?

¶10. (C) Dakarois avidly consume news, and private radio has made political junkies of illiterates, isolated farmers and grassland herdsman. As far as we can tell, most agree Wade is manipulating the pre-campaign. Some praise him as a canny politician committing allowable mischief, while others deplore alleged misuse of republican institutions and violation of the democratic consensus.

¶11. (C) We have heard Senegalese deconstruct and re-imagine worst-case political analyses for hours. Some popular assumptions are:

-- there is deep rural disappointment with Wade;

-- Wade may not be able to count on the youth or urban

poor support he had in 2000;

-- the Interior Ministry may be suppressing voter registration in rural areas where Wade is weak, and encouraging it in cities where he is strong;

-- Wade prolonged MPs' mandates and coupled National Assembly and presidential elections so that his presumed coat-tails would help him win parliament. (Almost surely true. Critics charge prolongation of MP terms was not constitutional, but the law allowing it was passed in due form by Wade's parliamentary majority.)

-- despite coupling of elections and allegedly biased registration, both opposition and PDS largely agree the PDS may/may lose parliamentary elections. (To compensate, Wade has indicated he may increase the overall number of MPs, and especially those chosen on the national list, which he can more easily influence);

-- to avoid cohabitation with an opposition parliament or loss of the presidential election, many think Wade will postpone or cancel elections, unilaterally or in cahoots with the opposition (Ref A);

-- ultimately, some fear Wade and his cronies -- if he actually holds free elections and loses them -- will use force, either friends in the police and gendarmerie or youthful thugs, to hold onto power (Ref D).

U.S. LEVERAGE AND FREE ELECTIONS

¶12. (C) Nine months before elections, we agree Wade is hiding, obscuring or obfuscating his intentions, but that may fall, just barely, within the realm of acceptable albeit dirty-trick-flavored politics. We are encouraged that media, labor unions, NGOs and some religious leaders have joined the opposition in insisting that coming elections be as free as in 2000. This proves again how deeply the democratic consensus is entrenched. Wade's less scrupulous hangers-on, including some in powerful ministries, may want to preserve privileges of power at all cost. Wade, though, has spoken often, widely and persuasively of his commitment to democracy.

¶13. (S) To help Wade act on his best instincts and ensure free, fair and transparent elections, we have identified ways in which the U.S. might best make its voice heard. Each measure has advantages and disadvantages, which we have also tried to define:

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-- The most powerful leverage we have is Wade's deep appreciation of Senegal's ties to America, and above all his warm relationship with President Bush. We would want to use such leverage only in an extreme situation, such as postponement or cancellation of elections. In such case, a statement from President Bush (or Secretary Rice) encouraging Wade's commitment to hold free elections would intensify pressure on Wade to actually do so. There would be a negative side, though. Wade would splash the U.S. message across the media, and this would be seen as an endorsement. This in turn would provoke two criticisms: that the U.S. was naive about Wade's intentions; and that its intervention, no matter how well-meant, was reinforcing rather than correcting Wade's supposed manipulations.

-- Wade expects signature of an MCA compact before the elections to show U.S. support for his economic programs, as Foreign Minister Gadio recently indicated to the Secretary. Assuming technical progress permits signing

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of a compact before the elections, the signing ceremony

could be used to stress the need for transparency. Wade would also exploit such a statement, though, and critics will in any case denounce any signing ceremony that takes place during the campaign. If greater pressure were required, scheduling could be subject to review of U.S. and other observers' evaluation of progress toward free elections.

-- The forms of pressure which we would at present prefer include: visits at the Assistant Secretary level (which again could be seen as U.S. favoritism to Wade); messages from the Assistant Secretary to Foreign Minister Gadio; an expanded series of speakers on democratic procedures and values; or aid to those with specific criteria for judging the electoral process' integrity (for example a manual for election observers being prepared by Law Professor Mamadou Kamara). We could also help, through our Public Affairs Section, to provide greater visibility to civil society NGOs we are aiding to strengthen democracy and good governance.

¶14. (C) Other ideas come to mind:

-- We could announce that we would send election observers to Senegal, but that would be essentially meaningless, since any manipulation will come during the registration process or in parliamentary-approved changes to institutions such as an increase in the number of MPs.

-- Any suggestion that we might reduce aid would have all the diplomatic delicacy of a sledgehammer with a double-long handle. Doing so would put into question all that the donor community are achieving in reduction of poverty and the Casamance peace process, not to mention U.S.-Senegalese cooperation in peacekeeping.

-- In past Senegalese elections, the National Democratic Institute has helped in the registration of voters. Such a program would require approximately a nine-month lead-time, though, and there is currently no funding available.

¶15. (C) The best tack to take for now, we believe, continues to be normal if intensified expression of interest in free elections, combined with continued close monitoring of election mechanisms and the campaign.

Jacobs